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National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21*

Mauritania

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I. Description of methodology and general consultation process for the preparation of the report

1. This report, prepared for the second cycle of the universal periodic review, is the product of consultations between the interministerial technical committee responsible for preparing reports, parliamentarians, elected local government officials, judges, the National Human Rights Commission, civil society, trade unions and the Country Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Mauritania.

2. It was subject to a consultation process that was initiated in February 2015 during a workshop attended by all stakeholders. Data were collected from the departments and institutions concerned. They were shared during meetings organized with parliamentarians and civil society organizations in June and July 2015. This report was approved on 14 July 2015 by an interministerial committee composed of all the departments and institutions concerned.

II. Country background and new developments since the previous review

3. Mauritania is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country. Its population is predominantly Arab and includes the Pulaar, Soninké and Wolof minority groups. There were 3,537,628 inhabitants in 2013, 27.1 per cent of whom live in Nouakchott, the country's administrative capital.[1]

4. Owing to its geopolitical and strategic position, the country faces multiple security and humanitarian challenges.

5. It has been battling recurring drought, which has an impact on its natural resources and poses a serious problem of food security, particularly in the *wilayas* (provinces) of Hodh Charghi, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Gorgol, Brakna, Tagant and Guidimagha.

6. As a transit and destination country for many migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and other regions, it also has to cope with a large influx of refugees, mostly Malians, who number 52,355 and have settled in the east of the country.

7. Despite these burdens, the country is making every effort to fulfil its international human rights obligations.

8. It has a decentralized and devolved administrative structure. This comprises several levels: *wilayas* (15), moughataas (sub-provinces) (55), districts (31) and municipalities (218).[2] These various entities contribute to the economic, social and political development of the country.

9. The judicial system is based on the principle of a double degree of jurisdiction (the same offence can be adjudicated both by a court of original jurisdiction and by an appellate court).

10. The Government has improved the efficiency of the justice system by making justice more accessible through the establishment of courts, including a court of appeal, in Aleg, two regional courts in Nouakchott North and South and a labour court in Zouerate. This new initiative also includes an anti-slavery court created in May 2015 by the Supreme Council of Justice and whose establishment is in the process of being approved by Parliament.

11. Moreover, improvements in the human, material and financial conditions of judicial personnel have led to a more efficient justice system.

12. The legal protection of human rights is guaranteed by the Constitutional Council and the national courts.

13. The Constitutional Council helps protect human rights by ensuring the constitutionality of laws. The Constitution gives the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the President of the Senate, and one third of deputies or senators the power to appeal to the Constitutional Council to have a law declared unconstitutional. For example, the Council declared unconstitutional certain provisions of Act No. 2010-035 of 21 July 2010 on combating terrorism.

14. Defendants have the right to the presumption of innocence, to the principle of legality with regard to offences and punishment, and to prepare their legal defence. Article 4 of the bill criminalizing torture provides that all persons deprived of their liberty have the right to legal counsel from the time they are taken into custody and not at the last moment, as previously provided in the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the right to contact their family. Persons who are indigent have the right to be assisted by a court-appointed attorney.

15. The 2012 constitutional review led to significant improvements in the regulatory and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of human rights, including:

- Formal recognition of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country;
- Definition of slavery and torture as crimes against humanity;
- According constitutional status to the National Human Rights Commission.

16. With a view to giving full effect to international human rights conventions, the country has a monistic constitutional system, which provides that such conventions, once ratified and published, have primacy over national law.

17. Since the 2010 review, Mauritania acceded, in 2012, to the:

- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

18. In 2015, it also acceded to the human rights instruments of the African Union to which it was not already a party.

The institutional framework for human rights

19. The promotion and protection of human rights has been enhanced since 2010 through the establishment of new institutions.

1. The High Council for Fatwa and Administrative Appeals

20. Established by decree No. 2012-134 of 24 May 2012, the Council reports to the Office of the President and enjoys financial autonomy. It gives advice on legal matters relating to sharia (Islamic law) that are of general interest, which are referred to it or taken up on the initiative of its president. It has the power to issue fatwas (opinions of Muslim jurists) and to revise, correct and publish them.

21. It examines complaints submitted by citizens, and may refer them directly to the public authorities and sectors concerned. It helps resolve conflicts between members of the public and local governments.

2. TADAMOUN

22. TADAMOUN, a national agency established in March 2013, is responsible for:

- Identifying the consequences of slavery and proposing programmes to eradicate them and to ensure the implementation of such programmes, in consultation with other stakeholders concerned with the issue;
- Ensuring the design, coordination, implementation and monitoring of programmes to integrate returnees into active life;
- Promoting and implementing programmes to combat poverty.

23. The Agency may exercise the rights granted to civil parties relating to any acts constituting an offence prosecuted and punished under Act No. 2007-048 of 3 September 2007 criminalizing slavery and punishing slavery-like practices. It has brought civil actions in the following cases, which are still pending:

- Choueiba case RP 18/2014 in Zouerate;
- Vreikine case RP 72/2015 in Zouerate;
- Issa ould Hemed case RP 35/2015 in Nema;
- Lalla and Knatha mint Mahmoud case RP 67/2015 in Nema;
- Mabrouka mint Mahmoud case RP 33/2015 in Nema.

3. National Preventive Mechanism on torture

24. The mission of the National Preventive Mechanism is to prevent torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in places of detention. It enjoys administrative and financial autonomy and does not receive instructions from any authority. Its composition reflects a de facto pluralism that ensures the involvement of all stakeholders (Bar Association, Medical Association, human rights organizations, universities, and private individuals). The bill on the National Preventive Mechanism is before Parliament awaiting adoption.

4. National case law: cases of slavery, torture and rape[3]

25. With regard to slavery, 31 cases of slavery-like practices have been dealt with by the courts, including 8 in Nouakchott and 23 in the *wilayas* of Hodh El Gharbi, Hodh Charghi, Tiris Zemour, Dakhlet Nouadhibou, Trarza, Gorgol and Adrar. The sentences imposed in these cases included imprisonment (2-year term), probation, a fine (200,000 ouguiyas (UM)) and civil damages for victims (UM 600,000).

26. As for torture, in its decision No. 108 of 7 March 2012, the criminal court of Nouakchott sentenced eight members of the National Guard to prison terms of 1 to 4 years for having tortured two detainees.

27. The statistics on rape recorded by the prosecutor's office at the court in the *wilaya* of Nouakchott are: 45 cases in 2013; 39 cases in 2014; and 15 cases in 2015. The sentences handed down ranged between 10 and 20 years' imprisonment.

5. National human rights institutions

28. These comprise the National Human Rights Commission, which was granted A status accreditation for national human rights institutions in 2011, and the Ombudsman.

6. Scope of international obligations

29. The Government published in a special edition of the Official Gazette, No. 1326 bis of 9 December 2014, the main international human rights legal instruments that Mauritania has ratified, with the support of the OHCHR Country Office. The instruments published are:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

30. The purpose of this measure is to foster compliance with the international instruments ratified by Mauritania and make it easier for parties to invoke these instruments before the national courts.

III. Promotion and protection of human rights on the ground

Work of national institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

1. Work of the National Human Rights Commission

31. As part of its awareness-raising efforts, the Commission, with the support of the UNDP-Japan project and the Spanish cooperation agency, carried out the following activities:

- Training in international humanitarian law;
- Training of members and staff of the National Human Rights Commission in the Paris Principles, with the support of the OHCHR Country Office;
- Seminars on migrants' rights for law enforcement, security and elected local officials;

- Study visits on conflict management and prevention for staff and some members of the Commission;
- Strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations and Commission members and staff on land, forestry and environmental legislation;
- Awareness-raising among NGOs and the decentralized government services on conflict prevention;
- Radio and television broadcasts to promote opposition to slavery-like practices.

32. The National Human Rights Commission played an active role in lobbying for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and worked for the establishment of the national preventive mechanism on torture.

33. The Commission has regularly sent missions to places of detention in Nouakchott, on average twice per month, and inland, six times during 2014. It has consistently called for improvements in detention conditions, particularly with regard to bedding, food and medical care.

34. Its recommendations on prison overcrowding had a significant impact on the transfer of detainees to the new prisons in Aleg and Nouadhibou. They also helped reduce the number of remand prisoners by 50 per cent.

2. Work of the Ombudsman

35. Between 2010 and 2014, the Ombudsman received 887 complaints against the public authorities, 765 of which were declared admissible and 414 were settled out of court. Of the remaining complaints, 284 are still being considered and are progressing well. The Ombudsman's intervention prompted the authorities to act upon 67 decisions by the courts in favour of public service users.

3. Work of the High Council for Fatwa and Administrative Appeals

36. In 2014, the Council received 40 complaints against public authorities, including 12 ministerial departments. It dealt with 11 complaints against the military and paramilitary sectors and 15 against other institutions. Most of the complaints were lodged by individuals.

4. Work of civil society organizations

37. The regular participation of civil society organizations in national, regional and international meetings in the field of human rights was supported by the public authorities and technical and financial partners.

38. Civil society organizations prepare independent, alternative reports, alongside those submitted by the Government. More specifically, they are involved in:

- Combating human rights violations;
- Providing direct assistance to victims;
- Promoting compliance with human rights legislation;
- Promoting knowledge of and respect for human rights.

39. Civil society organizations visit different prisons to observe detention conditions. Their involvement includes broad representation in national institutions responsible for good governance and the promotion of human rights. Thus they constitute the majority of members of the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Extractive Industries Transparency. The also sit on the sectoral committees responsible for the implementation of the various strategies.

40. Policies relating to children's rights are implemented with civil society involvement, especially with regard to children at risk and/or with special needs.

41. Civil society organizations have helped refer women in family conflicts to relevant organizations and raise awareness of the Personal Status Code and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; they have also helped women in such situations obtain places in shelters for victims of violence.

42. They have also helped to publicize the fatwa prohibiting female genital mutilation (FGM), to raise awareness, and have assisted in national campaigns to promote "zero tolerance for FGM" and combat early marriages.

43. Organizations dealing with persons with disabilities have received training on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

44. In this context, a joint commission has been established, composed of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family and the Mauritanian Federation of National Associations of Persons with Disabilities.

5. Cooperation with international mechanisms

45. The Government has cooperated effectively with the various international human rights mechanisms by ratifying important legal instruments, presenting some of its reports to the treaty bodies and agreeing to all requests by Special Rapporteurs to visit the country.

Ratification of international legal instruments

46. In 2012, Mauritania acceded to several international human rights legal instruments, as noted in the introduction.

Presentation of reports before the treaty bodies

47. In order to strengthen cooperation with the treaty bodies, the Government presented its reports to the Committee against Torture and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2012, the Human Rights Committee in 2013 and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2014. It has submitted its combined third to fifth reports under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

48. A follow-up report on the priority recommendations of the Human Rights Committee was prepared and transmitted to that committee in October 2014.

49. To address the delay in the submission of reports to the treaty bodies, the Government established an interministerial technical committee responsible for preparing reports and the follow-up to recommendations. In order to enable Mauritania to meet its obligations as a State party, the committee drew up a work plan for 2015, which is currently being implemented.

Visits by Special Rapporteurs

50. Between 2010 and 2015, Mauritania responded favourably to all requests for visits under the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. As a result, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia and related intolerance visited the country in 2011 and 2014, respectively. The Government also agreed to the request submitted in 2015 by the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.

Implementation of the recommendations of international human rights mechanisms

51. The Government, in collaboration with the OHCHR country office in Mauritania, has carried out several awareness-raising activities relating to the recommendations made to the country by the treaty bodies, Special Rapporteurs and the UPR Working Group. It has also overseen the implementation of the accepted recommendations. To this end, it has begun the process of developing an action plan for monitoring implementation of the recommendations.

IV. Follow-up to the previous review

This section deals with implementation of the recommendations formulated during the first review, broken down into the following thematic areas.

1. Women's rights

52. The general reservation formulated by Mauritania upon accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was withdrawn by letter No. Mismaur/236/KH/BB/14, dated 3 July 2014, addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. This reservation has been replaced by specific reservations concerning articles 13 (b) and 16 of the Convention.

53. A national strategy for gender mainstreaming, incorporating the provisions of the Convention, was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 5 March 2015. Its aim is to integrate gender in all public policies in order to guarantee the advancement of women and gender equity. It has two lines of approach:

- Horizontal integration of gender in all public policies and sectoral programmes;
- Vertical integration of the empowerment of women and efforts to combat stereotypes and gender-based violence. This also includes issues that are not covered by other departments.

54. A draft framework law on combating violence against women is under preparation in accordance with the action plan on implementation of the road map on eradication of contemporary forms of slavery. This proposed legislation defines and criminalizes rape.

55. Establishing a national commission to combat gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation (FGM), which has an advisory and guidance role; establishing regional and departmental committees in areas where there is a high prevalence rate; establishing a unit to combat gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation; implementing standard operating procedures which lead to an improved response and holistic care for survivors of gender-based violence; implementing an action plan for voluntary cessation of FGM in seven *wilayas* in the country.

56. Strengthening the gender perspective in the various updates of the strategic framework for poverty reduction (2011-2015), which gives prominence to the advancement of women and gender equity.

57. With the support of various financial partners the Government has implemented a number of economic programmes that promote the economic empowerment of women. For example, the Nissa Banks, the Women's Savings and Loan Group (GFEC), the Savings and Loan Bank (CAPEC), the Development and Savings Bank (CDD) and the sustainable development programme for oases. Regional and local savings and loan banks and mutual associations have also been set up to support women in their areas of operation.

58. With respect to the political participation of women, significant progress has been made by:

- Drawing up a national slate of 20 women for election as members of parliament;
- Drawing up a national slate of 20 seats and a slate of 18 seats at Nouakchott, alternately composed of men and women (one man, one woman);
- Increasing the number of constituencies having three seats to fill, at least one of which must be reserved for a female candidate.

59. The parliamentary elections of November 2013 resulted in an increase in the number of women elected to the National Assembly to 22.4 per cent, as against 19 per cent in 2006, and in the local elections to 35.58 per cent, compared with 30 per cent in 2006. In the Senate, women represent 18 per cent, as against 16 per cent in 2006.

60. In rural areas, a plan of action for the advancement of women aimed at promoting their rights, improving their health and their access to education and employment, and strengthening the capacities of the structures established for their development is being implemented.

61. Family policy was updated in 2013 to reflect the central role of mother and child. The Government has established family dispute units in all *wilayas*.

62. Awareness-raising sessions on the Personal Status Code and on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are regularly presented in the media.

63. Family dispute services registered and dealt with 5,440 family disputes between 2010 and 2014 of which 3,357 were related to child welfare.

64. The adoption of Act No. 2012-003 of 1 February 2012, repealing and replacing some provisions in Act No. 61-016 of 30 January 1961, which established the rules governing civilian pensions under Mauritania's Retirement Fund, as amended by Act No. 65-074 of 11 April 1965, has corrected a provision involving discrimination against women by introducing the right to survivors' benefits for widows and children.

65. Act No. 2014-032 of 31 December 2014 adjusted to 60 the pensionable age for women employed under a collective bargaining agreement.

2. Rights of the child

66. Concerning the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, the following measures have been taken:

- Implementation of a national child protection strategy;
- Drafting of a plan of action to combat child labour with the support of ILO, adopted by the Council of Ministers on 31 March 2015, the goal of which is to contribute to the elimination of all forms of child labour;
- Establishing regional councils in 10 *wilayas* to deal with child protection issues, in particular those affecting children with disabilities.

67. Establishing a plan of action for voluntary cessation of FGM in *wilayas* where the practice is widespread.

68. Adoption of a national strategy for the cessation of FGM with the aim of creating a national plan for promoting voluntary and permanent cessation of the practice of female genital cutting/mutilation by means of formal and public statements.

69. Its aim is to:

- Create an institutional environment that is favourable to the promotion of voluntary and formal cessation of female genital cutting/mutilation;
- Strengthen the capacity of stakeholders;
- Design an integrated communication plan for the elimination of FGM;
- Promote action research leading to the design and implementation of more targeted measures.

70. Special attention is paid to early childhood, as reflected in the following measures:

- Creation of a national council on children;
- Promotion of nurseries and kindergartens;
- Provision of equipment and supplies on a yearly basis for 8 public kindergartens in Nouakchott and 40 kindergartens in the *wilayas* of the two Hodhs, Assaba, Gorgol, Brakna, Tagant and Guidimagha;
- Conducting a "train the trainers" programme for preschool teachers;
- Including a module on preschool education in the national programme for development of the education sector;
- Continuing training for 200 kindergarten teachers each year;
- Recruitment of 60 schoolteachers by the State in 2013;
- Conversion of schools for deaf and blind children into public administrative institutions.

3. Torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

71. The prevention of torture constitutes a priority for the Government. Thus, on 26 February 2015, it adopted a bill that introduced a national preventive mechanism on torture in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, to which it acceded in 2012.

72. Awareness-raising training seminars have been organized for law enforcement officers on the subject of prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

73. Workshops on police custody and the suppression of torture were organized in 2012 by the Ministry of Justice for the benefit of magistrates and criminal investigation officers.

74. The administrative and judicial authorities have a duty to systematically undertake investigations as soon as an allegation of torture is made. The penalties are those set out under Act No. 2013.011 of 23 January 2013 on the prosecution of crimes of torture and slavery as crimes against humanity.

75. Furthermore, the National Human Rights Commission and the International Committee of the Red Cross are authorized to make unannounced visits to places of detention.

4. Eradication of the consequences of slavery and trafficking in persons

76. Eradicating the consequences of slavery and contemporary forms of slavery is a priority for action by the Government. To this end, on 6 March 2014, it adopted a road map for the eradication of contemporary forms of slavery and established an interministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister with a brief to implement the recommendations of the road map together with a technical committee for follow-up.

77. The OHCHR country office in Mauritania participates as an observer in this committee, along with representatives of ministries, of the National Human Rights Commission and of civil society organizations.

78. An action plan for implementation of the road map was adopted on 30 September 2014 and the following action was taken:

- Adoption by the Council of Ministers of a bill repealing and replacing Act No. 048/2007 criminalizing slavery and providing penalties for slavery-like practices, which grants NGOs the right to intervene as a third party in court proceedings;
- The commemoration on 6 March each year of the national day to address the legacy of slavery;
- The introduction of a cash transfer programme to help finance the enrolment of school-age children from poor families and/or those affected by the legacy of slavery;
- Approval of a plan of action to combat child labour;
- The development of educational infrastructures (schools, boarding schools) in priority education zones;
- Organization of awareness-raising campaigns to mobilize opposition to slavery;
- Holding workshops for civil society organizations and the media on anti-slavery legislation;
- The promulgation of a fatwa, on 27 March 2015, by the Association of Ulemas, on the illegitimacy of the practice of slavery;
- The initiation by the national agency TADAMOUN of income-generating projects for the benefit of those affected by the legacy of slavery.

79. In 2013, the national agency TADAMOUN received funding from the national budget in the amount of UM 2.8 billion or $9.7 million in order to carry out these programmes.

80. Thanks to this funding, it has been possible to carry out projects in education, vocational training, health, water, agriculture, livestock farming, fisheries, environment, affordable housing and small trades, particularly in priority areas (Adwabas). In addition, the agency is authorized to intervene as a third party in criminal proceedings in cases involving slavery.

81. TADAMOUN carried out the following activities in 2014 as part of efforts to eradicate the consequences of slavery:

- Construction of 20 comprehensive schools in the *wilayas* of Hodh Chargui, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Brakna, Tagant, Gorgol, Guidimakha, Trarza and Adrar;
- Construction of 20 school canteens (one for each comprehensive school);
- Construction of seven mosques and seven mahadras;
- Drilling of 16 boreholes and installation of 9 drinking water supply systems;
- Deepening of 14 wells and river water treatment in the *wilayas* of Trarza, Gorgol, Brakna and Guidimakha;
- Building and equipping 20 health centres in the *wilayas* of Hodh Charghi, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Brakna, Tagant, Gorgol, Guidimakha and Adrar;

- Construction of 1,159 social housing units at Nouadhibou and 1,000 social housing units in rural areas;
- Purchase of 1,500 animal-drawn ploughs for farmers;
- Construction of 12 dams in the *wilayas* of Hodh Charghi, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Brakna, Tagant, Gorgol, Guidimakha, Trarza and Adrar;
- Digging of 500 dykes and ditches in the *wilayas* of Hodh Charghi, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Brakna, Tagant, Gorgol, Guidimakha, Trarza and Adrar;
- Supplying 46 tons of seed in the *wilayas* of Hodh Charghi, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba, Brakna, Tagant, Gorgol, Guidimakha, Trarza and Adrar;
- Development of 500 hectares in key localities in some *wilayas* (not including Nouakchott);
- Distribution of 2,400 three-wheelers to economic interest groupings in collaboration with the urban community and the administrative authorities of Nouakchott.

82. An action plan to combat trafficking in persons in all its forms is being drawn up by the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action.

5. Prisons and conditions of detention

83. Improving living conditions in prisons is a constant concern of the Government, which attaches particular importance to respect for the minimum rules for detention. The focus of the public authorities is on inspection of prisons and improvement of the sanitary conditions in prisons, the nutritional status of prisoners and recreational facilities.

84. Prison inspections are carried out by the inspectorate of prisons of the Courts and Prisons Administration. The Department of Criminal Justice and Prisons Administration carries out internal inspections which supplement inspections on safety conditions. Finally, the prison commission monitors the legal situation of inmates, health, food and the conditions of detention.

85. Conditions of detention have been improved by the Department of Justice in cooperation with the competent ministries, which have made adjustments with respect to equipment, finance and personnel in order to create the necessary conditions for detainees to serve their sentences in dignity.

6. Ratification of and harmonization with international conventions and relations with the mechanisms

86. In order to give greater publicity to the universal periodic review and follow-up to its recommendations, several meetings (seminars and workshops) have been organized, in partnership between the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action and the OHCHR country office in Mauritania.

87. With a view to bringing national legislation into line with ratified international conventions, the Government published in the Official Gazette the laws relating to the main covenants and conventions that have been ratified by Mauritania.

88. A database on alignment of national laws with the provisions of the international conventions will be established with a view to amending laws that are not in conformity with ratified international instruments and enacting laws that will achieve the harmonization that is sought. Bills on torture, gender-based violence, criminalization of slavery and the national preventive mechanism on torture are currently before parliament.

7. Anti-corruption efforts

89. With a view to efficient management of public resources, the following actions have been carried out:

- Implementation of a national anti-corruption strategy;
- Finalization of a general framework for reform of management of public finances and a related medium-term operational plan;
- Implementation of sectoral anti-corruption action plans.

8. Freedom of non-Muslims to practise their religion

90. Foreign nationals are free to practise their religion without restriction. There are churches in several towns, where foreigners are free to hold religious services.

9. Food security and poverty eradication

91. Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Poverty Eradication (phase III) led to the achievement of a growth rate of 6.7 per cent.

92. The national strategy on food security and the strategy for the rural sector helped to increase the resilience of vulnerable populations.

93. The aim is to make growth more inclusive, to reduce inequality and to promote sustainable solutions to the problem of food security and the emergence of a modern and competitive agricultural sector.

94. These strategies have made it possible to:

- Increase the area under rice cultivation to 55,000 hectares in 2015, as against 18,000 hectares in 2009, thereby enabling the country to meet 86 per cent of its rice requirements, compared with 35 per cent in 2009;
- Supply markets with agricultural inputs at subsidized prices that are 45 per cent less than the cost price and distribute fertilizer free of charge to village cooperatives;
- Carry out a land reform focusing on irrigated land;
- Initiate a process to make agricultural insurance available and a programme for strengthening and upgrading the seed supply chain;
- Grant developed farmland to women's cooperatives;
- Cancel more than UM10 billion in farmers' debt so that they are able to make a contribution to the development of the sector[4];
- Finance agricultural projects undertaken by unemployed graduates;
- Improve, for the first time in the history of the country, more than 9,729 hectares, using the Government's own resources, and distribute the improved land to 3,341 families from the most vulnerable rural population groups (Beguemoune, Dakhle, Beylane, Aéré M'bar etc.);
- Simplify the procedure and formalities for acquiring ownership of irrigated land in rural areas and reduce the associated costs;
- Provide agricultural equipment (65 combine harvesters, 135 tractors), at reduced cost, to 48 collective economic interest groupings (GIE) from the most disadvantaged segments of society;

- Distribute fertilizer free of charge to village cooperatives and subsidize agricultural inputs for other producers;
- Support women's cooperatives engaged in market gardening (free provision of water pumping equipment, inputs and gardening tools);
- Strengthen the Food Security Watch technically and financially;
- Set up a network of village food reserves comprising 4,439 grain banks;
- Supply 105 collective feeding centres for malnourished children under 5 years of age and for nursing mothers and pregnant women;
- Distribute supplementary feeding for 9,600 children attending the 233 kindergartens in 7 *wilayas*;
- Provide nutrition, health, psychosocial, educational and vocational training services through a child protection and social rehabilitation centre for 457 children from deprived backgrounds, 31 of whom had no family support;
- Conduct an awareness-raising programme for 22,548 women on reproductive health, breast-feeding and prevention of malaria;
- Monitor and screen 18,000 children under 5 years of age in community feeding centres;
- Deworm 12,348 children;
- Transfer 1,854 malnourished children to care facilities;
- Assist 52,000 individuals in 700 feeding centres, managed in cooperation with the World Food Programme;

95. The Emel (hope) programme, established in 2012 and funded by the State budget at a cost of approximately UM 30 billion, has guaranteed the operation of 1,124 shops. The shops are situated in areas where 225,000 families live; 1,125,000 people have thus benefited daily from a reliable supply of food at reduced prices.

96. The distribution free of charge in 2014 of 11,051 tons of food to 137,240 households representing some 823,440 persons.[5]

97. The livestock sector is one of the pillars of the national economy. It generates 12 per cent of GDP, ensures self-sufficiency in red meat and 30 per cent of milk needs. Comprehensive management by the State of genetic and health improvements in livestock and the construction of facilities for artificial insemination have boosted milk production and led to the opening of a milk-processing plant at Nema; additional plants are under construction at the sheep pens located in Bénichab and Boghé.

98. These measures, which are aimed at food self-sufficiency, have had a positive impact, enabling the country to meet its needs for foodstuffs and meat and dairy products despite population growth and irregular rainfall.

99. Since 2009, they have especially helped the poorest of the poor, in particular people affected by the legacy of slavery and those living in rural areas in general.

100. The Government's efforts to promote food security and the eradication of poverty were recognized by the international community in 2014, in the form of an award from FAO for achievement of the Millennium Development Goal target on food security and poverty eradication.

101. With respect to social housing,[6] we note the following:

- Urban redevelopment has transformed the shanty towns in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, Rosso and Kaédi;

- 600 housing units were built in Zouerat;
- 2,600 households were identified in connection with the operation to resettle the people living in Kebba (outlying district of Wharf);
- 1,159 social housing units were built in Nouadhibou;
- A strategy for the development of local building materials was finalized.

Support from donors

102. The World Food Programme has given food and nutritional assistance to vulnerable populations in eight *wilayas*. It supports the Commission on Food Security in monitoring and evaluation and in conducting household surveys on food security;

103. The Italian cooperation agency supported 78 microprojects relating to hydroponics infrastructure;

104. Japan, for its part, funded projects of the Commission on Food Security in 2014 in the amount of 4.5 dollars.

105. Other partners (FAO, World Bank, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Islamic Development Bank) provide assistance for the strengthening of food security.

10. Repatriation of Mauritanian refugees from Senegal

106. The repatriation operation entailed the organization of 106 convoys and the return of 24,536 persons, who were distributed among 5,817 families in 118 specially adapted sites in 5 provinces (*wilayas*) of the country (Trarza, Brakna, Gorgol, Guidimakha and Assaba).[7]

107. Significant measures have been taken to facilitate the economic and social reintegration of the returnees, including:

- Construction of basic facilities (schools, health stations, markets, mosques, boreholes, dykes and embankments) and improvements to farmland;
- Financing of microprojects and income-generating activities;
- Reintegration of former civil servants and contract staff employed by the Government;
- The distribution of land for residential purposes, etc.;
- Registration of returnees by the National Population Registry Agency at special reception centres set up for returnees in the *wilayas* of Trarza, Brakna, Gorgol, Guidimakha and Assaba, and issuance of birth certificates on the basis of the Civil Status Census.

108. In the course of this operation, a database was compiled, civil status documents were issued to 21,960 returnees and a committee of returnee representatives was established to rule on pending cases.

109. The completion of the repatriation operation was marked by a ceremony on 25 March 2012 in Rosso attended by the President of the Republic and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

110. The programmes initiated by the National Agency for the Reception and Integration of Refugees are now being conducted by TADAMOUN.

11. Commemoration of National Reconciliation Day

111. The day of national reconciliation is celebrated on 25 March each year.

112. To mark this important event, the organizations representing the victims of the repression organize activities in partnership with the national institutions concerned (such as the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action, TADAMOUN and the National Human Rights Commission).

113. In 2009, the day of national reconciliation in Kaédi was marked by an acknowledgement of the State's responsibility for the events that took place, a request for forgiveness, the saying of a prayer in memory of the victims and the disbursement of compensation to their dependants.

12. Health

114. Reducing maternal and neonatal mortality is one of the major pillars of the country's public health policy.

115. The main health indicators are as follows:

- Availability of health-care coverage within a 5 km radius stands at 79 per cent;
- The mortality rate of children under 5 stands at 114 per 1,000 live births;
- The maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births stands at 626;
- The contraception rate stands at 14 per cent;
- The proportion of births assisted by a qualified practitioner stands at 56 per cent.

116. The State has taken significant measures to improve the health of the population and to reduce maternal and infant mortality, including:

- Creation of training schools for health-care personnel (Nema, Aioun, Kiffa, Kaédi, Sélibaby, Rosso);
- Expansion of health-care coverage and improvements in the quality of and access to services;
- Construction of health-care facilities;
- Redeployment of personnel to outlying areas;
- Revamping of the office responsible for procurement of medicines and supplies;
- Establishment of an institute for viral diseases;
- Creation of a sectoral coordination unit in 2012 to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals related to health.

117. The aforementioned measures yielded the following results:

- A rise in the rate of prenatal consultations from 65.25 per cent in 2012 to 67.7 per cent in 2013;
- An increase in the use of contraception to 5.11 per cent in 2013, as against 4.31 per cent in 2012;
- An increase in the anti-tuberculosis (BCG) immunization coverage of children under 1 year from 86.56 per cent in 2012 to 91 per cent 2013; polio 3 immunization coverage increased from 77.7 per cent in 2012 to 78 per cent in 2013; immunization coverage for the pentavalent vaccine increased from 78.42 per cent in 2012 to 79.31 per cent in 2013; and varicella (chickenpox) immunization coverage increased from 69.65 per cent in 2012 to 73 per cent in 2013.[8]

118. Acting through the National Health Insurance Fund, the Government has increased health insurance coverage, extended coverage to diseases requiring treatment abroad and reined in health spending.

119. As at 31 December 2014, the number of persons covered by national health insurance stood at 356,873. This increase is attributable to the extension of health insurance to employees of public institutions, State-owned companies, privately owned companies, retirees having worked for those entities and their dependants.

120. In order to reduce maternal and infant mortality, efforts have been deployed in the following areas:

(a) Human resources

- Recruitment of 840 staff across all categories in 2014;
- Roll-out of a new database, together with measures for a staff restructuring;
- Availability of continuing education, the retraining of staff and the training of specialists abroad;
- Training of 14 temporary laboratory technicians; 25 ultrasound technicians; 60 staff specialized in the integrated management of childhood illness in Nouakchott; and 120 staff specialized in basic emergency obstetric and newborn care;

(b) Health-care facilities

- Construction of the Sélibaby School of Public Health, the children's wing of the Mother and Child Hospital, 13 health centres, 21 health stations and 2 hospitals in Kaédi and Boghé;
- Start of construction work on two hospitals, in Kiffa and Nema, each with a capacity of 150 beds;
- Refurbishing of premises intended for use by the haemodialysis services in the hospitals of Rosso, Zouerat, Kaédi, Aleg, Tidjikja, Akjoujt and Atar;
- Increasing the capacity of the dialysis centres of four hospitals (the National Hospital of Nouakchott and the hospitals in Sélibaby, Aioun and Kiffa) by adding 26 generators, two treatment rooms and dialysis beds;
- Setting up dialysis centres in all hospitals located in the provincial capitals;
- Improving the technical facilities of health centres.

(c) Medicines

The Government has taken significant measures to assure the quality of the medicines used, including:

- Granting the monopoly to import medicines, particularly antibiotics, psychotropic drugs and medicines for the treatment of diabetes, to the Medicines and Medical Equipment and Supplies Procurement Centre;
- Creating two points of entry for medicines at the airport and the autonomous port of Nouakchott;
- Requiring pharmacies to comply with applicable standards;
- Purchasing 345,000 long-lasting insecticidal mosquito nets;
- Purchasing 500,000 rapid diagnostic test kits for malaria.

13. The right to education

121. With the aim of guaranteeing effective enjoyment of the right to education, education is free and compulsory for all children of school age.

122. Significant efforts have been made in this area:

Basic level

123. The number of children with access to schooling increased from 535,976 in 2010/11 to 552,591 in 2011/12, and then from 568,953 in 2012/13 to 592,249 in 2013/14, representing an annual average growth rate of 4.1 per cent.

124. The number of classrooms increased over the same period from 14,174 in 2011/12 to 15,200 in 2012/13. Meanwhile, the number of basic schools reached 4,290 in 2014, compared to 3,682 in 2010.

125. The gross intake rate, which measures the system's capacity to accommodate children in the first year of basic education, rose from 105.3 per cent in 2010/11 to 108 per cent in 2011/12, and from 119 per cent in 2012/13 to 122 per cent in 2013/14.

126. A gender-based analysis shows that the gross intake rate for girls is higher than the rate for boys.

127. The gross enrolment ratio, which measures the total capacity of the system, rose from 98.7 per cent in 2012/13 to 100.9 per cent in 2013/14, representing a 2.2 point increase. As in the case of the gross intake rate, a gender-based analysis of the gross enrolment ratio indicates that the ratio has been higher for girls than for boys over the last three years across the different provinces. Thus, the parity index is greater than or equal to unity.

128. Basic education retention capacity was a major priority during the first phase of the National Development Programme for the Education Sector. An increase of 12.1 percentage points was registered during the implementation period for phase one of the National Development Programme (2001-2010), during which time the rate increased from 46.5 per cent to 58.6 per cent.

129. The basic education completion rate decreased from 73.66 per cent in 2010 to 73.08 per cent in 2011, and then to 70.24 per cent in 2012 before rising to 72.58 per cent in 2013; in 2014, the rate fell to 72 per cent.

Secondary level

130. The progress made in basic education has placed a great strain on secondary education. The Government is responding to this challenge by recruiting more teachers and building more educational facilities.

131. Between 2012 and 2014, the number of educational institutions increased from 402 to 485. The number of students rose from 151,454 in 2011/12 to 171,265 in 2012/13 and then to 177,267 in 2013/14, representing a growth rate of 8 per cent over that period.

132. The transition rate between the sixth year of basic education and the first year of secondary education increased from 36.7 per cent in 2010 to 51.9 per cent in 2014, representing an average annual growth of 3.8 points over that period. The analysis of this indicator reveals marked disparities between regions and between girls and boys. Accordingly, the Government has attached considerable importance to the construction of schools in rural areas.

133. In 2013 and 2014, the gross enrolment ratio at the lower secondary level stood at 37.6 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively. The national gross enrolment ratio at the

upper secondary level stood at 21.5 per cent in 2014, compared to 20.90 per cent in 2013, 18.98 per cent in 2012, 14.32 per cent in 2011 and 15.09 per cent in 2010.

134. A programme establishing education priority zones has been introduced with the aim of achieving universal primary enrolment. The programme targets the rural and impoverished areas where the out-of-school and dropout rates are considered to be too high.

Tertiary level

135. There have been substantial quantitative and qualitative changes in higher education since 2010. Several higher education institutions have been created, namely the University of Science, Technology and Medicine; the University of Islamic Sciences, the Polytechnic Institute, the National Institute of Public Works, the School of Mining, the Naval Academy, and the Higher Institute of Languages, Translation and Interpreting.

136. The opening of the new university campus in 2014, which includes, in addition to two universities and two higher education institutes, a university library and a distance-learning centre, will improve the quality of instruction.

137. In the area of governance, academic freedom has been strengthened by providing for the election of members of the establishments' decision-making bodies and faculty deans, and the appointment of university presidents on the basis of a competitive selection process.

138. Equal access to higher education is guaranteed by article 57 of Act No. 2010-043 of 21 July 2010 on higher education and scientific research.

139. Positive discrimination in favour of women is provided for in the regulations in force. Under the decree passed on 26 September 2011, 6 per cent of overseas scholarships are to be reserved for girls.

140. In order to consolidate these achievements, the year 2015 was declared the Year of Education.

V. Achievements, best practices, challenges and constraints in the implementation of recommendations

A. Achievements and best practices

141. In 2014, the Government set up an interministerial technical committee responsible for drafting reports and monitoring the implementation of the recommendations made by the treaty bodies and during the country's universal periodic review. The committee is made up of representatives of all ministerial departments, the National Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman and the OHCHR country office in Mauritania. The representatives of the latter have observer status in the committee.

142. The interministerial technical committee has approved its work plan for 2015 and has begun drafting reports relating to the implementation of the following conventions:

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

143. To improve the monitoring of the recommendations made during the country's universal periodic review, several events (seminars and workshops) were organized by the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

144. These activities were concerned primarily with the recommendations made during the country's universal periodic review and the preparation of an action plan for their implementation. In addition to representatives of government bodies, parliamentarians, magistrates, judicial officers and representatives of the organizations and institutions responsible for defending human rights also took part in the seminars and workshops.

145. Moreover, the Government has undertaken, with the support of its partners, to draw up an action plan to combat racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, and a draft national strategy for strengthening social cohesion.

146. Several training and awareness-raising seminars were organized for law enforcement officials on the prohibition of torture and other degrading treatment, in accordance with the applicable international standards.

B. Challenges and constraints

147. Certain recommendations from the first cycle have not yet been acted upon.

148. The main challenges facing Mauritania are those relating to the implementation of an action plan to combat trafficking in persons and the withdrawal of its general reservation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has also encountered difficulties in giving effect to other recommendations. A prime example is the slow pace of action for the adoption of legislation on, inter alia, female genital mutilation and gender-based violence.

VI. Priorities, initiatives, national commitments, difficulties and constraints

A. Priorities

149. National priorities revolve around strengthening the rule of law, democracy and national cohesion; security and the fight against terrorism; poverty eradication; good governance; anti-corruption efforts; the eradication of the legacy and contemporary forms of slavery; education, health and the advancement of women and young people.

B. Initiatives and national commitments

150. From 2010 to 2014, in its capacity as a member and Vice-President of the Human Rights Council, and as Chairperson of the African Union, Mauritania has demonstrated its support for just causes and issues relating to respect for human dignity in Islamic, Arab, African and international forums.

C. Constraints and challenges

Constraints

151. Underdevelopment is still a major obstacle to the full enjoyment of economic and social rights.

152. Despite the enormous difficulties facing the country, the Government, with support from its technical and financial partners, is conducting ambitious programmes to combat poverty and to promote human rights with a view to achieving the post-2015 development goals.

Challenges

153. The main obstacles preventing the country from achieving the full enjoyment of human rights include:

- The inadequacy of the human and financial resources of the institutions and organizations responsible for defending human rights;
- The low level of specialization of magistrates and judicial officers in human rights;
- The absence of a human rights component in school curricula.

VII. Expectations and assistance needs

154. There has been an OHCHR office in Mauritania since 2010. It provides technical assistance to the competent national institutions (the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action, the National Human Rights Commission, the competent ministerial departments and other institutions, the national courts and civil society organizations). This assistance must continue in order to support the reforms undertaken in the area of human rights.

155. This support should be aimed at building the capacity of the institutions responsible for human rights, primarily the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family, the National Human Rights Commission and the interministerial technical committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the country's international human rights obligations.

156. The implementation of the action plan to give effect to the recommendations of treaty bodies, those made under special procedures and those made during the country's universal periodic review requires support from various partners.

157. Specific assistance should be provided to improve prison policy in general and, in particular, to bring prisons up to standard.

158. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania is grateful to all friendly countries and its technical and financial partners for their contribution to the efforts undertaken as part of its national policy for the promotion and protection of human rights and calls upon the international community for greater cooperation with a view to achieving the post-2015 development goals.

Notes

[1] Source: National Statistical Office.

[2] Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization.

[3] Source: Ministry of Justice.

[4] Source: Ministry of Agriculture.

[5] Office of the Commissioner for Food Security.

[6] Strategic Framework for Poverty Eradication (phase III).

[7] Source: TADAMOUN.

[8] Source: Ministry of Health.